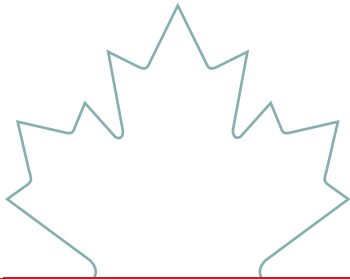


Greetings from the President



A

s we continue to experience the “new normal” living with COVID-19 as an endemic disease, we recognize that mental health issues amongst students and staff have increased in our communities. Student learning can only occur if they are ready to learn and feel safe, alert, engaged, and focused. The importance of mental supports in public schools at this time cannot be overstated. Mental health issues among children and adolescents have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, and public schools have a critical role to play in addressing these challenges. Student dysregulation seems to be increasing due to the pandemic, and gaps in school community-led socialization during online learning. Negative social media messaging and the drive to get “likes” isn’t helping.

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) has played a leading role in advocating for improved mental health services in schools. Current CASSA Board member and a past President, Cindy Finn co-wrote a discussion paper in 2017: *School Leadership in School Mental Health in Canada*, that is incredibly relevant even today.¹

The themes of many of the CASSA *Leaders and Learners* magazines, dating back to before 2017, have had some focus on staff and student wellness and the development of healthy schools. Several of CASSA’s summer conferences have had wellness or health themes in recent years. CASSA is a founding member of the Canadian School Mental Health Leadership Network. A recent survey conducted by the group revealed concerns with impact of increased screen time was having on students’ mental wellness.

Mental health challenges, such as anxiety, depression, and stress, can have a significant impact on students’ academic performance, social interaction, and overall well-being. The availability of mental support services in public schools can make a crucial difference in students’ lives by providing them with proactive or just in time resources and guidance they need to cope with these challenges.

Moreover, providing mental support services in schools can help destigmatize mental health issues and encourage students to seek help when they need it. In many cases, students who are struggling with mental health issues may



Kevin Kaardal
CASSA/ACGCS President

not seek help because they fear being judged or labeled as weak. By providing mental support services in schools, we can help create a culture that recognizes mental health as an essential component of overall health and well-being.

Many districts are providing direct clinical support workers for students in schools. There is clear evidence that these supports make a difference. Many families may not have access to clinical supports outside of schools. More is being asked of school districts as we work to set the conditions where students can grow and thrive holistically as learners and eventually positively contributing global citizens.

Districts across the country have developed unique solutions to provide these supports. Provincial initiatives have been funded by their respective Ministries in some provinces. The opportunities do not seem to be equitable across the country. It is crucial that governments and public schools prioritize mental health supports and make them an integral part of their curriculum and overall support services. Through networking as system leaders, we can help each other by sharing wise practice or successful advocacy efforts. CASSA could play a role in facilitating the sharing of good ideas for this important work. Together we are stronger. Together we can have an impact to improve the mental health of those we serve. It is imperative that we do so.

Reference:

1. Short, Kathy H., Cindy Finn, and H. Bruce Ferguson. “System Leadership in School Mental Health in Canada.” *CASSA Discussion Paper*, 2017. https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca/cms/lib/ON01929128/Centricity/Domain/8/CASSA_Discussion_Paper_System_Leadership_School_MH.pdf.



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**All websites and email addresses are active. Click them to connect immediately with various resources.*

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

Strategic planning update

As I highlighted in Issue 6 from 2022, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) has established three strategic planning committees: Professional Learning, Communication and Engagement, and Governance and Operations. The work of these committees is capably facilitated by three board members Barb Isaak (MASS), Jan Langelier (AAESQ) and Cindy Finn (ADGESBQ). The Professional Learning committee began its work to create webinars that would engage system leaders throughout Canada. Since then, the focus has shifted to facilitating and leading the professional learning component of our July conference.

The Communication and Engagement Committee has been working on infographics which, when ready, will highlight information about CASSA and the association's beliefs. Lastly, the Governance and Operations committee has been working on preparing revisions to the current (2015) by-laws with a view to creating a more diverse board of directors and to align dates and operational aspects of the association to reflect practices that have evolved over the years. The task of ensuring a more

diverse board is not an easy undertaking since the CASSA board is made up of members selected by provincial and territorial associations. In essence, the board's composition is reflective of whomever each association submits as its representatives. More to come as the work of these three committees progresses.

National Advisory Council on publicly funded education update

CASSA's board has given its approval to have CASSA formally join this newly formed national advisory council.

Context: All children and youth in Canada should have access to high-quality publicly funded public education regardless of their postal code, culture, language, or family circumstance. Considering this, the federal government and federal stakeholders have a key role to play to support public education to best serve the needs of students and their families. The advent of a National Advisory Council on publicly funded public education (or NACE for short) is a necessary step in ensuring that all stakeholders at the national level have an open line of communication with each other, and with the federal government.

Objective: The main objective of this advisory council is to bring together national stakeholders in publicly funded public education to work towards strengthening public education from coast to coast to coast for the betterment of all children and youth, and – by extension – Canadian society. The NACE will explore social, environmental, and economic challenges facing Canadian public education.

I will have further updates on the work of our strategic planning committees and NACE along with another initiative in which CASSA has extended its reach beyond our own borders.

Visit our website to find information about flights, hotels, and most importantly, our three keynote presenters! <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/index.html>.

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CASSA's New President *Kevin Kaardal*

*Kevin, his two daughters Maria and Danielle, and his wife Cynthia.
Photos courtesy of Kevin Kaardal.*



By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) selects a new president for its executive every two years, and last summer it welcomed Kevin Kaardal to the role. Kevin has been a member of CASSA for five years. This level of leadership is not unfamiliar for Kevin, as he was previously the president of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association

(BCSSA) and sat on its board of directors for 13 years. He is also a member of the Education Council for the EdCan Network and serves as an advisor to the College Board for Canada.

As president, he says he is most looking forward to continuing to connect with leaders from across the country and to learn from his colleagues. That kind of pan-national focus is one of CASSA's most notable achievements, he notes.

"It's exciting that we have representation from throughout Canada and serve as a national voice for educational matters that have national significance," he

says. "I'm also proud of our ability to provide excellent professional development and networking for school system leaders."

Kevin's path to working in public education began when he earned his Bachelor of Education in Secondary Education from the University of Alberta and his Master of Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Calgary. He has 38 years of experience in school systems in Alberta and British Columbia as a teacher, school principal, and district senior leader, including serving as superintendent of schools and CEO for the Burnaby School District.



Kevin on vacation.



Kevin, his mother Anita, and his wife Cynthia at his daughter Danielle's wedding.

Kevin enjoys photographing nature wherever he can.



He is currently the superintendent of schools and CEO for Central Okanagan Public Schools, a position he has held for seven years.

Central Okanagan Public Schools serves approximately 24,000 students at 46 schools. It is the fifth largest school district in the province and operates on Okanagan Territory. Its students are based in four municipalities—Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna, and Lake Country—as well as the Regional District of Central Okanagan, communities that include an increasing number of immigrant families and refugees. The district also serves over 3100 Indigenous students, and is very proud of their strong relationships with Westbank First Nations. (To learn more about Central Okanagan Public Schools, visit sd23.bc.ca.)

Kevin was inspired to work in public education by many people, particularly his grandmother.

“My maternal grandmother Rita Rogerson was a teacher, and I admired her relationship with students. She

inspired me by connecting me with nature, encouraging my curiosity, and making me believe I could accomplish anything,” he says, recalling how she spent a lifetime improving children’s life chances.

He also finds inspiration from school and district leaders he’s encountered throughout his education and career. He strives to live up to their example by setting the conditions where each student is prepared to thrive and contribute to a civil global society.

Kevin is the author of *Learning By Choice in Secondary Physical Education: Creating a Goal-Directed Program* (published by Human Kinetics). He has presented at several provincial, national, and international conferences on topics including organizing for change, personalized learning, creating cultures and inquiry, and engaging communities to support vulnerable learners. He has been formally recognized for innovative programs and has received numerous awards for teaching excellence.

Another point of professional pride is his role leading school boards to be inclusive and supportive of the LGBTQ2S+ community in policy and action. Kevin believes that building positive, proactive, trusting relationships is at the heart of any successful endeavour, and that this is particularly true of developing exceptional schools and districts that play a significant role in developing students who possess the personal and curricular competencies and agency to flourish as lifelong learners.

“British Columbia operates one of the highest performing education systems in the nation because of our inclusive approach to education,” he says. “The foundation of this work is districts’ efforts to create safe, caring, and inclusive learning communities in our schools.”

He is particularly honoured when former students or athletes he has coached reconnect with him to share their journeys and have him meet their families. He is most proud of the teams approach he has fostered so talented educators can use the best research and practice to focus on the continuous improvement of school and student learning results. Central Okanagan’s most recent district graduation results are 96 per cent.

Kevin is a strong proponent for working collaboratively with education and community partners to set learning conditions that personalize learning that support the development of student agency and purpose. He believes that each student must deeply feel their dignity and worth as persons rooted in their history, culture, and family. He is proud of the work he has undertaken as an ally to Indigenous leaders and nations as they journey to reveal the truth of Canadian history and seek true reconciliation that is effective today.

Kevin has been happily married for 38 years to Cynthia. They have two beautiful, brilliant daughters who are well on the way in their life journeys. In his spare time, he enjoys fine and performing arts, golf, travel, astronomy, scientific advancement, and paleontology. ○



John photographed with new Board of Trustees at Halton Catholic District School Board's Inaugural Meeting and Installation Ceremony in November 2022. Photos courtesy of John Klein.

Faces in the Crowd:

John Klein



John Klein, Director of Education.



Official blessing and ground-breaking ceremony of Milton #9 Catholic Elementary School.

John Klein is the new director of education for the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB), a role he assumed in October 2022.

The Halton Catholic District School Board is a model learning community, widely recognized as distinctively Catholic. A provincial leader in student achievement, HCDSB provides exceptional educational experiences and services to close to 37,000 students of all ages at 46 elementary schools, 10 secondary schools, and three continuing education facilities. HCDSB serves the communities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton, and Oakville, Ontario. The board's roots go back to 1856 with the founding of St. Mary's School, the

first Catholic elementary school in Oakville. Prior to his role with HCDSB, John was the superintendent of education with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB).

John was born and raised in North Bay, Ontario. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Ontario, a Bachelor of Education from McGill University, and a Master of Education in International Educational Leadership from Charles Stuart University in Australia.

He began his career in education 1990 as a teacher with the WCDSB. His roles with the board also included

principal at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Elementary School in Cambridge and at St. Matthew Catholic Elementary School in Waterloo, and principal of WCDSB's Section 23 schools. In Ontario, Section 23 schools serve children and youth who are unable to attend a local school because of social, emotional, behavioural, and mental health needs.

In 2015, John was promoted to superintendent of learning for WCDSB. He was responsible for several portfolios, including Faith Formation, English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, the Arts, Health, and School Supervision.

He is a lay minister at St. Louis Parish in Waterloo and serves on the board of directors of the Waterloo Region Catholic Schools Foundation. John is the proud father of three children now in their 20s. In his off-work time, he enjoys all forms of art, reading, hiking, and canoeing.

Recently John kindly took the time to explore with *Leaders & Learners* the topics of public education and leadership.

What inspired you to work in public education?

I was blessed to have been taught by wonderful teachers from kindergarten through high school. These men and women created environments and communities where I felt challenged, engaged, and included. Education also afforded me opportunities to be creative and have a real positive impact on students. My family valued education and saw it as the foundation of a society that cherished justice, prosperity, and inclusion. I found the flexibility and abundant pathways teaching offered enticing and invigorating.

What drew you to roles in senior administration?

Impacting the classroom was rewarding but I eventually felt called to work at the district level as a superintendent responsible for such portfolios as curriculum and schools, and more recently

as director of education. The stage has broadened but the work of listening and learning remains the same.

How would you describe your personal style of leadership?

I tend to lean on staff and colleagues as I gather input prior to decisions. I work to listen to as many as possible and trust staff to do their job. As such, I work to distribute leadership as the creativity, experience, and impact of the collective trumps that of the individual.

What does leadership mean to you?

Part of leading involves letting go of the roles and responsibilities you were used to and leveraging those experiences and skills in your new position. This involves being patient with myself and that can be a challenge. Essentially, leadership is a call to service and sacrifice and to ensure those in the margins are not forgotten.

What are your professional points of pride as a senior administrator in public education?

All senior leaders in Canadian schools should reflect proudly on their amazing accomplishments during the pandemic. Large systems are not particularly responsive and adaptable, and I was so proud that we were able to ensure that

the most that could be done for students and families amidst great turmoil and stress. We maintained publicly funded education when it was most in peril and as our communities became increasingly polarized. We kept students safe and maintained hope for a better future.

How long have you been involved with OCSOA?

I have been a member of OCSOA for eight years and have served on its board and executive council as well as numerous committees. I am also the current chair of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Ontario, which strives to support the development of educational leaders, research, and policy.

How long have you been a member of CASSA?

I have been involved with CASSA since becoming a superintendent and have been on the board for nearly a year.

What are you most looking forward to in your role with the CASSA board?

I look forward to learning more about the challenges and accomplishments schools and systems face in other provinces and territories, and seeing how I can effect change in my own board and province based on that.

Thank you for taking part, John. ○

Reminder: Deadline for CASSA Awards Nominations Approaching

Do you know a school system leader whose work deserves to be recognized at the national level? Is a colleague in your school district or regional affiliate making significant contributions to the work of senior system administration and education in Canada? Perhaps it is time to put forward their name for the EXL Award.

The deadline for nomination packages is fast approaching. Nominations for this year's awards are accepted up to May 16, 2023. Nomination forms can be found on the CASSA website. The recipient will be recognized at the CASSA annual conference in Victoria, BC, and at the 2024 American Association of School Administrator's conference.

The EXL Award has been supported by Xerox Canada since 2002. CASSA recognizes and is grateful for this long-term partnership.

In addition to the EXL Award, CASSA also presents two other special awards: the Honourary Life Membership and the Distinguished Service Award. The nomination process and deadline are the same as those for the EXL Award.

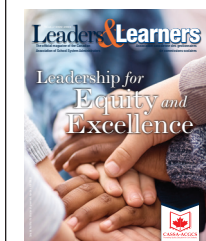
Mark Your Calendars for CASSA's Annual Conference in 2023!



July 5-7, 2023

Victoria, British Columbia

The CASSA Annual Conference looks forward to seeing you in beautiful Victoria, British Columbia, in 2023! Re-connect school system leaders from across Canada to learn and share information on current topics in education. **Save the date!**



WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO WRITE FOR US!

The CASSA Board is looking for authors interested in writing for the upcoming Winter 2023-2024 issue of *Leaders & Learners* magazine. If you have an article idea that fits into a theme about leadership, please send an abstract to Jenna Collignon, editor of the magazine, at jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net, and copy ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca. We are looking for features and success stories from each region of Canada: Eastern Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Western Canada and Northern Canada.

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